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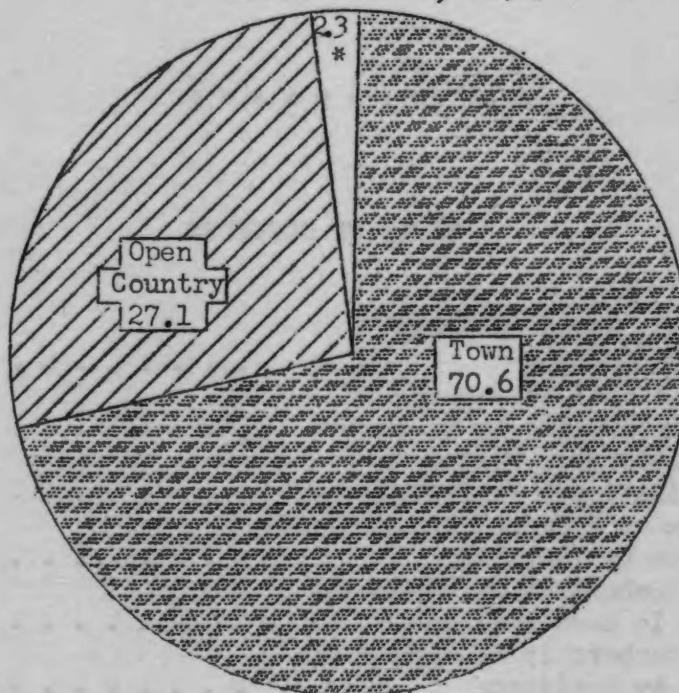
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THE PROBLEM OF OVER-CHURCHED
and
Unchurched Areas
in
Moody County

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Place of Church Attendance of Moody County
Farm Families, 1940.



* Do not attend.

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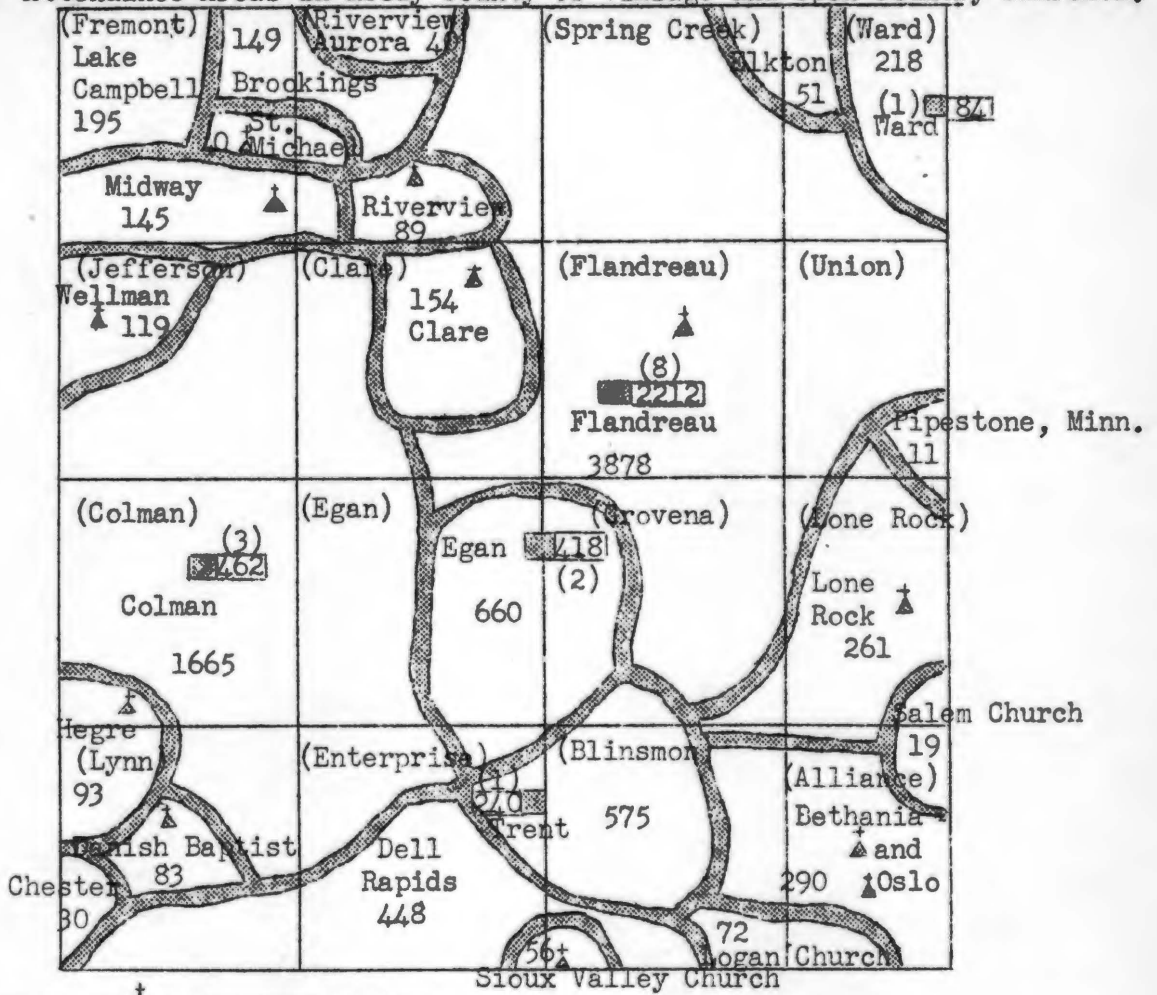
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Figure 1. Attendance Areas in Moody County of Village and Open Country Churches.



Legend:  Open country church

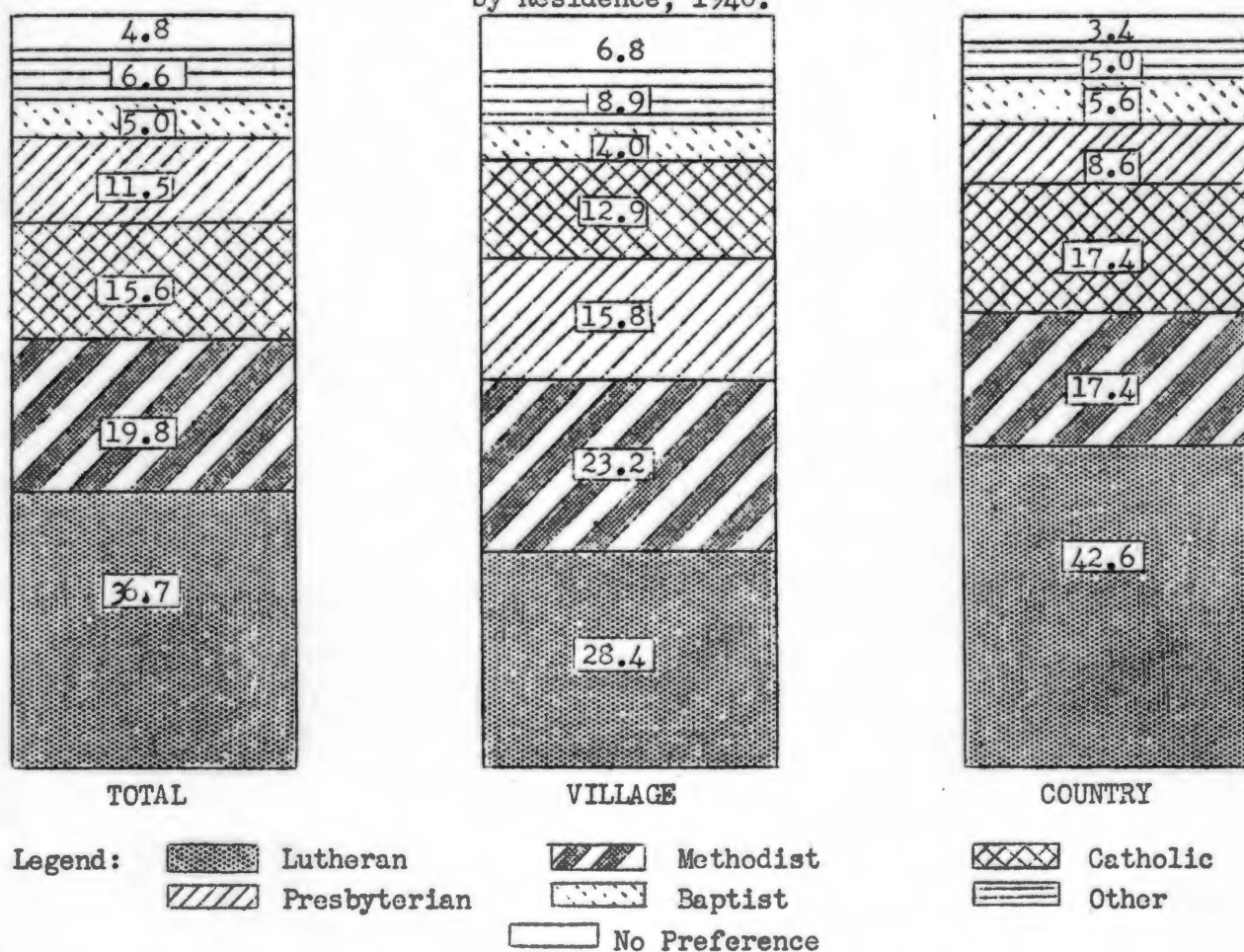
(3)
 462 Village location, with number of churches and 1940 population.
 re within each church area represents the total population of the
 of 1940.

The attendance areas in Kingsbury county of churches located in or near the county are shown in Figure 1. It is evident that village churches serve appreciably larger country areas than do churches located in the open country. In 1940, 94.7, or 70.6 percent, of the farm families attended church in towns and villages. Three hundred, sixty-four--or 27.1 percent--attended country churches. The remaining 31 families (2.3 percent) did not attend church.

Twenty-seven churches were operating in Moody county in 1940. Fifteen of these churches, representing nine separate denominations, were located in the five villages of the county, with Flandreau having eight of them. Colman had three churches, Egan 2, and Trent and Ward one each.

Of the 12 open country churches, 6 were Lutheran, 2 Methodist, 2 Baptist, 1 Catholic, and 1 Presbyterian (Indian). As shown in Figure 1, the areas from which they secure their attendance generally have an insufficiency of population for supporting a church with a well-rounded and adequate program. It appears that the open country church as an institution is declining in importance and is being gradually superseded by the town and village church.

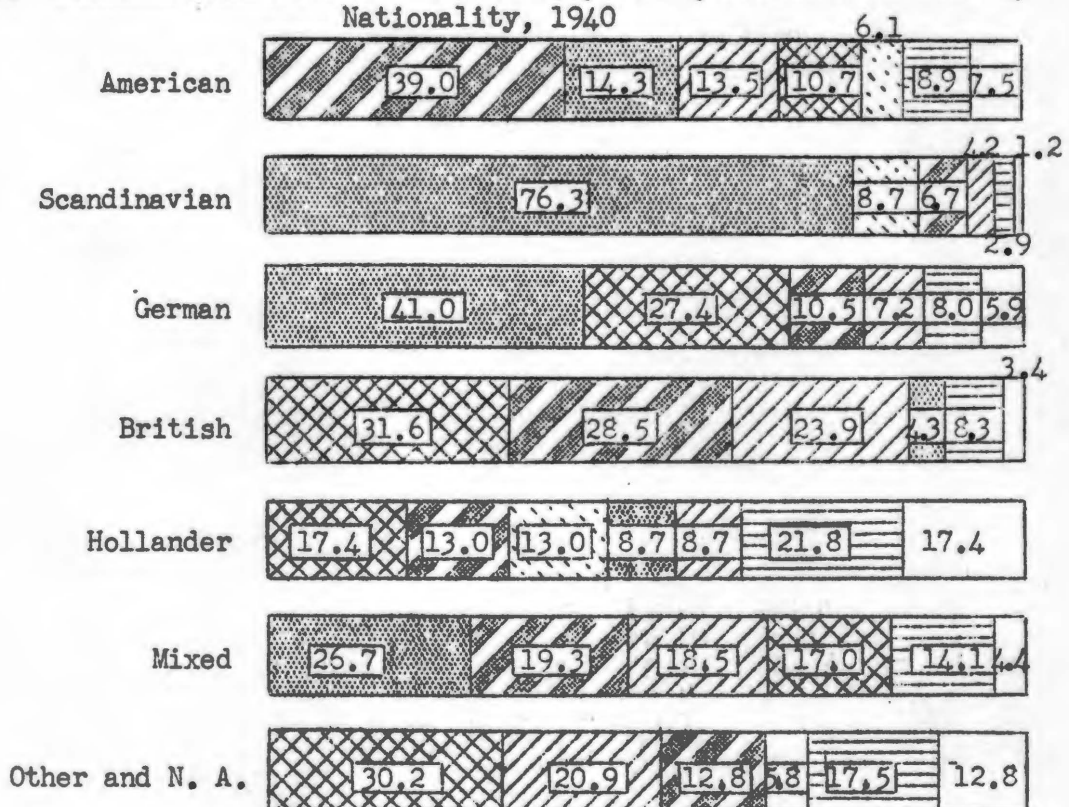
Figure 2. Denominational Preference of Moody County Household Heads by Residence, 1940.



Of a total of 2275 household heads in Moody county in 1940, 2166, or 95.2 percent, expressed a preference for some denomination. The Lutheran denomination was preferred by 36.7 percent of all household heads; the Methodist by 19.8 percent; the Catholic by 15.6 percent; the Presbyterian by 11.5 percent; and all other denominations by 6.6 percent. Only 4.8 percent of all household heads failed to indicate denominational preference.

A comparison of village and country household heads brings out certain significant differences. Ninety-six and six-tenths percent of the 1346 farm household heads expressed a denominational preference, as did 93.2 percent of the household heads in villages of the county. The Lutheran was the preferred denomination of 42.6 percent of all farm household heads. However, only 28.4 percent of the heads of village households expressed Lutheran preference. The Methodist and Presbyterian churches had a proportionately greater following among village than among country residents, enlisting as they do a considerable number of business and professional men and their families. On the other hand, the Catholic and Baptist preference groups were proportionately larger in the country than in the village. The percentage of household heads who expressed no church preference was only one-half as great in the country as in the village.

Figure 3. Denominational Preference of Moody County Household Heads by Nationality, 1940



Legend:

Lutheran
 Methodist
 Baptist
 Catholic
 Presbyterian
 Other
 No Preference

A significant finding of the current study is the high degree of relationship existing between nationality background and denominational choice. Foreign-born settlers, who were attracted in considerable numbers to Moody county, have shown a vigorous tendency, as have their children, to cling to the dominant denomination, or denominations, of their native land. More than three-fourths (76.3 percent) of the household heads of Scandinavian origin and over two-fifths (41.0 percent) of those of German descent adhered to the Lutheran denomination. The Catholic church claimed the second highest preference group among the Germans with 27.4 percent. Largely because of the Irish influence, almost one-third of the household heads of British ancestry preferred the Catholic church. The presence of the English and Scotch elements in the same group is reflected in the prevalence of Methodist and Presbyterian followers--28.5 and 23.9 percent, respectively.

The second, third, and succeeding generations tend no longer to identify themselves with the nationality of descent, but usually classify themselves as American or "mixed". Foreign culture patterns, among them denomination preference, are gradually modified through contacts with other groups. It is significant to note the comparatively even distribution of preference among the leading denominations for household heads in the American and mixed groups.

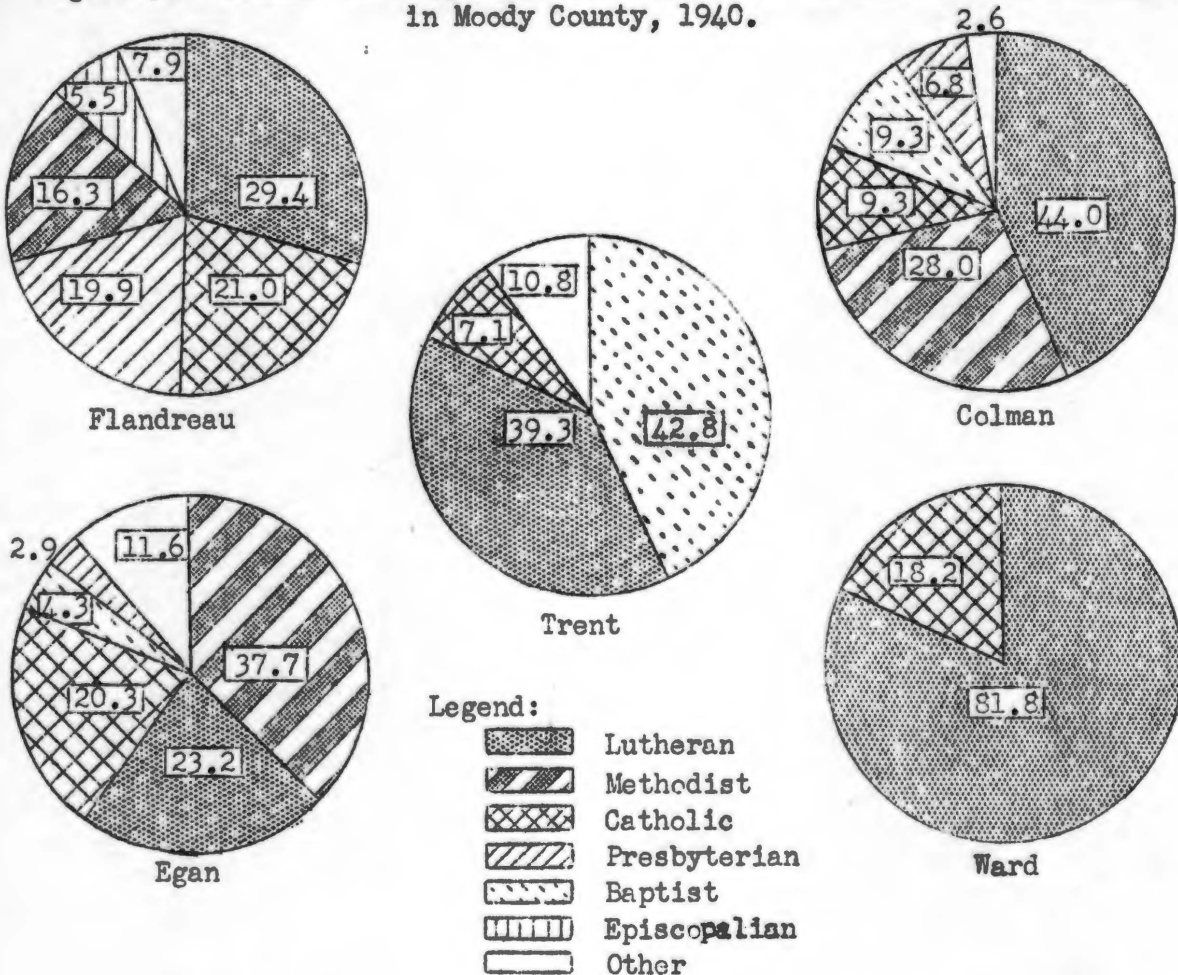
Figure 4. Predominant Nationality and Denomination by Township, Moody County, 1940.

Fremont	Riverview	Spring Creek	Ward
Mixed	American	German	German
Lutheran	43.7	42.3	62.0
53.7	Mixed	Mixed	Lutheran
			50.0
Jefferson	Clare	Flandreau	Union
Scandinavian	Scandinavian	British	German
40.0	44.2	37.4	57.4
Mixed	Lutheran	Mixed	Mixed
	48.8		
Colman	Egan	Grovena	Lone Rock
Scandinavian	Mixed	Mixed	Scandinavian
55.9	Mixed	Mixed	46.5
Lutheran			Lutheran
56.9			55.1
Lynn	Enterprise	Blinsmon	Alliance
Scandinavian	German	Scandinavian	Scandinavian
55.3	54.6	63.3	77.2
Lutheran	Catholic	Lutheran	Lutheran
54.4	49.4	51.4	82.4

Figure 4 shows the predominant nationality and predominant denomination in each township in which predominance clearly exists (to be considered dominant a nationality or denomination was required to have 20 percent more followers than any other single nationality or denomination), along with the percentage which the farm household heads of the given nationality and denomination were of all farm household heads in the township.

The Scandinavians predominated in seven townships, located primarily in the western and southern portions of the county. In six of these, the Lutheran church was the dominant denomination. The Germans prevailed in four townships chiefly in the north-east corner of the county. The Lutheran and Catholic denominations were each predominant in one of these townships, with the other two classed as "mixed" in respect to denomination ascendancy. The British and the American nationalities were each predominant in one township, while in the remaining three no nationality was represented in sufficient numbers to claim dominance. The Lutheran church was predominant in eight townships and the Catholic in one. In the remaining seven no single denomination prevailed.

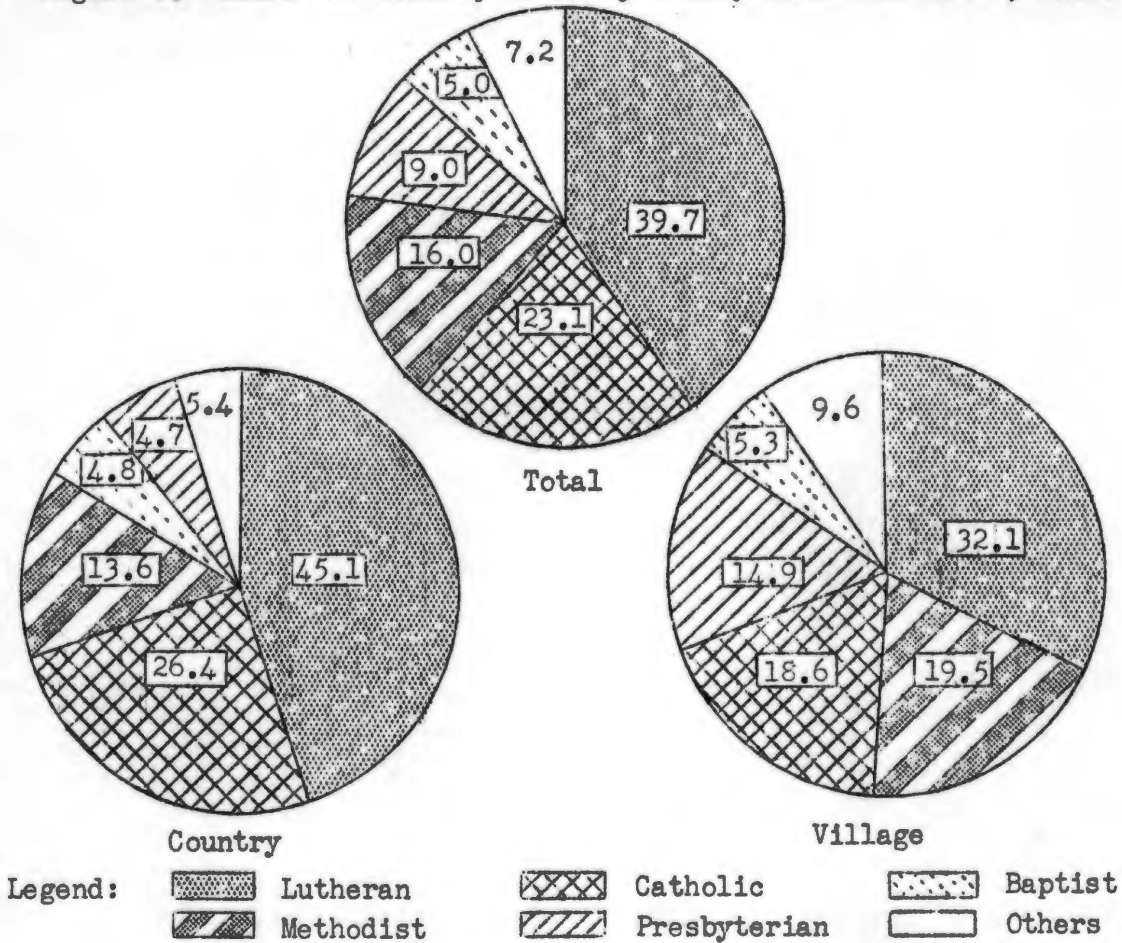
Figure 5. Church Preference of Household Heads in Each of the Villages in Moody County, 1940.



The chart above shows the proportion of household heads in the five villages of Moody county who prefer each of the leading denominations. It will be noted that in the county-seat village of Flandreau, preference is rather evenly divided among four denominations—Lutheran, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist in the order named. The Lutheran church was the choice of 29.4 percent of the household heads. It was likewise the leading denomination in Ward (81.8 percent) and Colman (44.0 percent) and ranked second in the other two villages—Trent and Egan, where its preference group comprised 39.3 percent and 23.2 percent of all household heads, respectively.

The Methodist denomination had its greatest following at Egan where it led with 37.7 percent, and at Colman where it was preferred by 28.0 percent of the household heads for second ranking. The Baptist church was predominant at Trent where it was favored by 42.8 percent of the preference group. The Catholic church was preferred by some residents in each village, with its strongest support at Flandreau and Egan (21.0 percent and 20.3 percent, respectively).

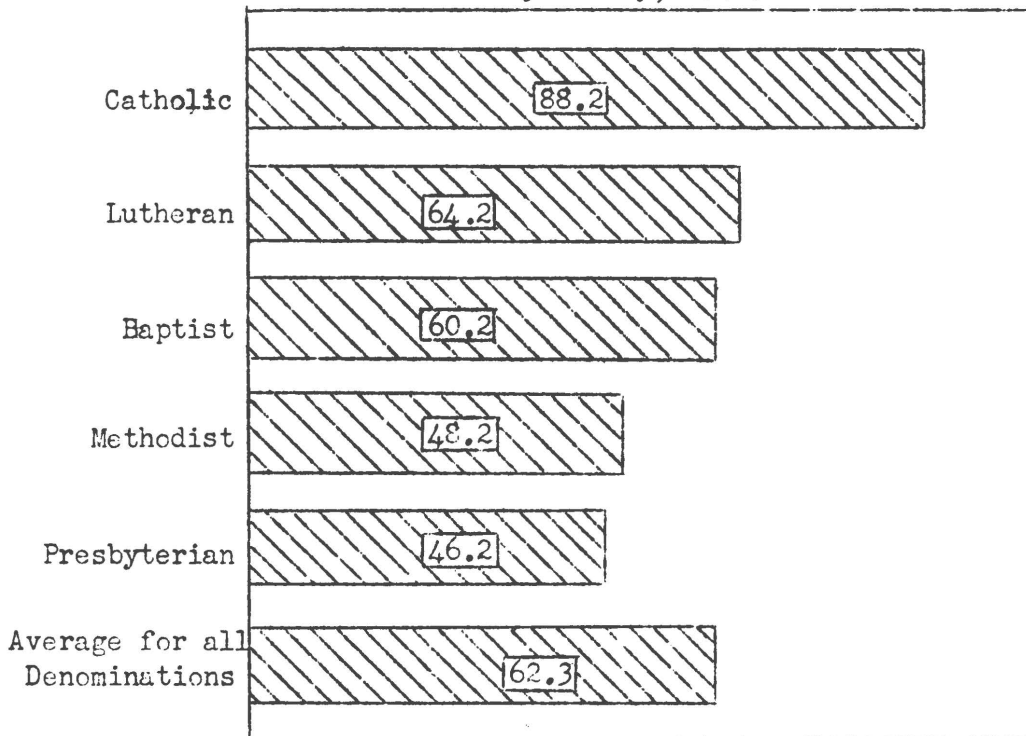
Figure 6. Church Membership of Moody County Household Heads, 1940.



Of the 2,275 household heads in Moody county, 1353, or 59.5 percent, were members of some denomination. This percentage, it will be noted, falls far short of the percentage who expressed a denominational preference. The three leading denominations, Lutheran, Catholic and Methodist, accounted for almost 80 percent of the total membership. Thirty-nine and seven-tenths percent of all church members were Lutheran, 23.1 percent were Catholic and 16.0 percent were Methodists. The Presbyterian and Baptist were the next ranking denominations, with 9.0 percent and 5.0 percent, respectively.

Although the Lutheran denomination had a plurality of members in both village and country, its greatest strength lay in the country. There it enrolled 45.1 percent of all church members as compared with 32.1 percent in the village. The Catholic church, likewise, had a considerably larger proportion of the country than of the village membership—26.4 as against 18.6 percent. The Methodist church had only 13.6 percent of the country members but had 19.5 percent of the village membership on its rolls. Membership in the Presbyterian church was even more highly village-centered—14.9 percent as compared with 4.7 percent in the country. The Baptist church claimed a slightly higher percentage of membership in the village than in the open country.

Figure 7. Ratio of Membership to Preference, Five Principal Denominations in Moody County, 1940.



It is evident that certain denominations have greater success than others in enrolling a large proportion of their preference groups as members. For all denominations, 62.3 percent of the household heads who expressed a preference were church members. The Catholic church ranked highest by enlisting 88.2 percent of its preference group. The Lutheran denomination follows with 64.2 percent to rank just ahead of the Baptist denomination, which had 60.2 percent of its preference group on the church rolls. The Methodist and Presbyterian churches had the lowest ratio of membership to preference among the principal denominations--48.2 percent and 46.2 percent, respectively.

The intensive indoctrination program which the Catholic church promotes is chiefly responsible for the church's superior recruiting power. Emphasis is placed on the learning of the catechism by children and their early induction into the church. The Lutheran denomination likewise conducts a rather intensive confirmation program among children to account for its relatively high ratio of membership to preference. In certain of the other protestant denominations less effort is put forth to bring children into church membership. Consequently, many persons either drift away from the church in which they were reared, or they continue to express a preference for the church without becoming members. As years pass by they are less and less likely to come into the membership.

Figure 8. Percentage of Farm Household Heads Expressing Preference, and Having Membership, Moody County, 1940.

Fremont	Riverview	Spring Creek	Ward
94.6	85.0	98.7	88.0
53.8	60.9	38.2	36.0
Jefferson	Clare	Flandreau	Union
100.0	95.3	97.3	100.0
55.0	74.4	52.3	48.9
Colman	Egan	Grovena	Lone Rock
95.7	95.4	97.8	96.5
70.9	45.9	54.7	60.3
Lynn	Enterprise	Blinsmon	Alliance
95.1	94.8	98.1	91.2
66.9	64.9	60.5	84.2

Legend: Top Figure - Preference; Lower Figure - Membership.

Figure 8 shows the percentage of farm household heads in each township who expressed denominational choice and who were church members in 1940. Considerable variation is seen to exist among the townships in both preference and membership. In Union and Jefferson townships, 100 percent of the farm household heads expressed a denominational preference, as compared with 85.0 and 88.0, respectively, for the two townships, Riverview and Ward, which ranked lowest in this respect. In Alliance township 84.2 percent of all farm household heads were members of some denomination. On the other hand, membership in Ward township totalled only 36.0 percent of the household heads.

Several townships--principally Ward, Spring Creek, Egan, Union, Flandreau, Fremont, and Jefferson--appear to be rather seriously unchurched in view of their low percentage of membership. It would appear that the religious needs of farm people in these areas are not being adequately cared for at the present time. Yet the solution to the problem will probably not come through organizing additional open country churches. With improved methods of transportation the country church in many cases has been rendered an impractical unit. Finances are inadequate and the program is often too weak and limited to attract new members. Town churches, which already serve seven-tenths of the farm families of Moody county, are within easy reach of outlying farm areas and are in much better position to appeal to the unchurched. Eventually town churches may absorb all the existing open country congregations, with the town becoming the true community center for religious, as it has for certain other, services.

Suggestions for Solving the Problems of Over-churched and Unchurched Areas in Moody County

Moody county is distinctly over-churched in that it has a greater number of churches than the population can adequately support. The National Home Missions Council recommends a ratio of one church per thousand of the population. On this basis, Moody county, with a population of 9,341 in 1940, should have approximately nine or ten churches. The actual number, however, is 27 or about three times as many as the recommended figure. At the same time, large numbers of Moody county residents are not availing themselves of church membership or attendance, thus indicating the existence of unchurched areas. The following suggestions are made for solving the problems of over-churched and unchurched areas in Moody county.

I. Town Areas

Paradoxical as it may seem, over-churching in towns is partially responsible for an unchurched condition there. Either over-churching within a denomination or denominational overlapping has the effect of reducing adequate financial support. Without sufficient finances it is impossible for a church to maintain a program sufficiently vital to attract the unchurched. As C. Luther Fry has expressed it, "A weak and ineffectual church, like the abandoned church, is a burden upon religious faith. It is a feeble symbol (a dying epistle one might say, known and read of all men) that religion as there exemplified approaches impotence." Furthermore, the existence of a large number of small sects, each with a conflicting creed is apt to have a tendency to produce contempt for the Christian religion on the part of the unchurched. The first step, therefore, would be to cut down denominational overlapping by one of the following methods of comity.

- a. Denominational Exchange - This is an arrangement whereby two denominations agree to an exchange of churches in two different localities. Members of a weak church in a given locality agree to merge with a strong church in another denomination. In another locality the opposite process may be carried on within the same two denominations.
- b. Undenominational - In this type of union the uniting churches sever all connections with denominations.
- c. Federated - This is an arrangement whereby two or more denominations maintain a joint local worship but each of the united bodies continues to keep affiliation with its own denomination.
- d. Affiliated - When this type of union takes place, a loose connection is maintained for certain purposes with some one denomination.

II. Country Areas

Since practically all farm families in Moody county live within eight miles, or easy driving distance, of town churches, the solution to the problem of reaching unchurched farm families will probably not be found in organizing additional open country churches. Town churches, which already serve two-thirds of the county's farm families, are in a better position by virtue of their better equipment and superior programs to interest the unchurched than are open country churches. However, it will probably be necessary for them to make special and well-planned efforts to appeal to the unchurched farm people if the latter are to be brought into participation and membership. This might be done through visiting gospel teams, church-sponsored vacation Bible Schools in rural school buildings, country evangelistic services, and special "Rural Life Sunday" programs.